United Nations S/PV.8081

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8081st meeting
Monday, 30 October 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Gueguen	(France)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/902)

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17-35064 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/902)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Lowcock is joining via video-teleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/902, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: This is my second briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria. In Amman today I have discussed the position with the Jordanian authorities and the United Nations humanitarian leadership team based in the region. One conclusion is obvious: the impact of the Syria crisis continues to be profound. My briefing today focuses on the humanitarian issues inside Syria. High Commissioner Grandi will speak to the Council on the refugee situation on Thursday.

More than 13 million people inside Syria still need humanitarian assistance; 6.3 million of them are exceptionally vulnerable and in acute need as a result of displacement, hostilities and limited access to basic goods and services. Conflict and violations of international humanitarian law continue to be the principal drivers of humanitarian need, with civilians in many parts of the country enduring massive suffering.

Military operations and hostilities in some parts of the country, particularly in the east, continue to drive displacement. The number of long-term internally displaced persons (IDPs) has decreased from 6.3 million to 6.1 million over the past year, while IDP returns, especially of those temporarily displaced, have been increasing in some parts of the country. But levels of new displacement remain high, with some 1.8 million people reported to have been displaced between January and September.

I want to flag some specific current problems which particularly concern me, and then I will summarize where we are on the humanitarian response.

I am worried about the impact of fighting and airstrikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Raqqa governorate, with scores of civilians reportedly killed in recent months. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) may be largely pushed out of Raqqa, but after years of oppression and almost a year of intense fighting, humanitarian needs will continue to be large for some time to come. Since the beginning of the anti-ISIL offensive in November last year, airstrikes and clashes have resulted in more than 436,000 people being displaced from Raqqa to 60 different locations, including in neighbouring governorates.

I am also concerned for the safety and protection of civilians at risk from unexploded ordnance throughout Raqqa city, particularly those trying to return to their homes. The United Nations anticipates that, despite the directive issued by local authorities for civilians not to return to the city until it is deemed safe, people will go back to try to check on and protect their homes and their personal assets. Further to the east, in Deir ez-Zor governorate, heavy fighting and airstrikes continue to result in civilian deaths and injuries.

Large-scale displacement also continues, with the International Organization for Migration reporting some 350,000 people displaced since August, including more than 250,000 in October alone. In mid-October, in Mayadin city and surrounding areas in Deir ez-Zor governorate, around 15,000 people were reportedly without access to health services following air strikes on the city, rendering hospitals and medical points inoperable. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) report that the attacks on Mayadin destroyed a vaccine cold room, with at least 140,000 doses of United Nations-provided measles and polio vaccines lost. Until a new cold room is built and the required cold-chain equipment — including solar fridges, cold boxes and vaccine carriers — are delivered, routine

immunization for vulnerable children in the area will be delayed. This is a particular setback for efforts to check one of the world's largest polio outbreaks in recent memory, an outbreak which continues to plague Deir ez-Zor in particular, with new cases continuing to be reported.

In Homs governorate, over a period of 20 days this month, ISIL reportedly executed at least 128 people in reprisal killings, accusing them of collaboration with the Syrian Government. And an estimated 50,000 Syrians remain stranded in the desert in Rukban, in an area known as the berm, along the Syrian-Jordanian border. In the past year, there have been only two distributions of United Nations humanitarian food assistance to these people, and it has been four months since the last partial distribution. As limited commercial supplies are reaching Rukban, access to food is precarious and the overall situation remains dire. As the winter months approach, the situation will become even more acute. Ongoing assessments and data collected through the United Nations health clinic underscore the fragility of the situation. A long-term durable solution to the plight of these people has to be found.

Meanwhile, immediate access to enable life-saving assistance for the civilian population is critical. Clearly the best approach is to find a solution from within Syria. We are straining every sinew to do that. Whatever happens, it is our collective duty to avoid yet another humanitarian catastrophe in Syria.

Nearly 3 million people in Syria continue to live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. In eastern Ghouta, daily shelling continues to be reported in recent weeks. Humanitarian access to eastern Ghouta — one of the four de-escalated areas where nearly 95 per cent of Syria's besieged population lives — has been severely curtailed for months. Since the start of the year, 110,000 people have received food assistance, out of an estimated population of nearly 400,000. Today the United Nations and partners delivered food, nutrition and health assistance to 40,000 people. An alarming number of child malnutrition cases have been recorded there, and more than 400 people with health problems require medical evacuation. I join the call of the World Food Programme (WFP) and others for unimpeded humanitarian access.

Against that background, the United Nations and our partners continue to implement in Syria one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world. We are reaching millions of people on a monthly basis. For example, in September the WFP provided food assistance to more than 3.3 million people, UNICEF reached over 1.5 million people, and the WHO reached over 800,000 people. We have just completed a major piece of work to analyse implementation of activities so far this year, and I have separately made available new data on that.

I would like to update members on the position on humanitarian assistance to areas controlled by the Government of Syria, cross-line activities and cross-border activities. Between January and August, United Nations and non-governmental organization programmes, in close cooperation with various line ministries of the Syrian Government, have reached an average of well over 4 million people a month in Government-controlled areas of the country. Those programmes continue to represent the vast majority of our work inside Syria.

Next, on cross-line activities, we continue to face considerable challenges in meeting the humanitarian needs of people in hard-to-reach and besieged locations. As the Secretary-General points out in his monthly report (S/2017/902), there is an expectation that progress in de-escalation will result in increased humanitarian access. While we continue alongside others to work hard on the issue, this has yet to materialize. Since the beginning of the year, on average fewer than a quarter of the United Nations inter-agency cross-line convoys requested under the monthly and bimonthly plans have been able to proceed. Thus far in October, inter-agency convoys have collectively reached fewer than 200,000 people. On average, only 10 per cent of people in besieged locations have been reached with United Nations assistance each month this year, and that is also the total thus far for October, including today's deliveries.

The removal of life-saving medicines and medical supplies continues. We have briefed the Council on that before. I hope that, in the coming days, real and tangible progress can be made on cross-line activities, through the trilateral coordination mechanism in Damascus.

As I said last month (see S/PV.8058), it remains our view that cross-border assistance, as provided for in resolution 2165 (2014), has been a lifeline. That assistance has allowed the United Nations to reach millions of people in need in northern and southern parts of Syria. Since United Nations cross-border

operations began in July 2014, we have deployed more than 16,400 trucks, carrying assistance through authorized crossings into Syria. On average, aid was delivered to 2.76 million people a month through cross-border operations between January and August this year. A considerable proportion of the many millions in need in both northern and southern Syria have been regularly reached — not just once or twice, but consistently and systematically throughout the last three years. Our experience with cross-line operations from within Syria, which I have just referred to, leads us to believe that it would be impossible to reach those people in a sustained manner from within Syria. I therefore regard a renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) as essential. Millions of people depend on the activities it mandates.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing.

First of all, allow me to recognize, as we do each month, the permanent, dedicated and brave work of the thousands of humanitarian workers of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and its local partners seeking to improve the living conditions of millions of civilians, who are always the primary victims in this and other conflicts.

We cannot stress it strongly enough that humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law must be respected. Whenever they are violated through grave crimes, those responsible must be held accountable. We must urgently have immediate, secure and unhindered access to deliver humanitarian relief to all those in Syria who need it. Nevertheless, many hotbeds of intense fighting persist and remain a source of concern. Regrettably, every month OCHA and the Secretary-General inform us that humanitarian access in the country continues to encounter serious problems, despite constant efforts to coordinate with Syrian authorities to change the dynamic on the ground.

We call on countries with influence to do what they can to ensure that humanitarian aid can be delivered in a fluid, secure and unhampered manner. For that to occur, Damascus must allow OCHA's bimonthly plans to be fully implemented by issuing all necessary permits to that effect. The Government of Syria bears the primary responsibility for allowing its own people to access food, water, medicine and supplies to ensure their survival as long as the conflict has not reached a definite end. The provisions of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of the injured, the sick and medical facilities and personnel, must be fully complied with. We will continue working to strengthen that resolution. Attacks on hospitals and health-care personnel violate the most basic international humanitarian laws and may constitute war crimes.

The Astana process and other regional initiatives launched in recent months to achieve the cessation of local hostilities have enabled a significant reduction in the fighting in the country this year by implementing of various violence de-activation zones. Despite this, there are still several hot spots with intense fighting and this situation directly impacts the distribution of supplies.

I want to dwell today on the emergency humanitarian situation — or I would say, food catastrophe — in eastern Ghouta, where there are at least 350,000 civilians under siege and which was described last Friday as "an outrage" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein. UNICEF reported on 23 October that there are over 1,100 cases of child malnutrition, 232 of which are severe acute malnutrition. Today, Monday, 30 October, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock mentioned, it is reported that supplies for 40,000 people were authorized for the cities of Kafr Batna and Saqba. Unfortunately, according to the reports and statistics regularly provided by OCHA, the percentages of the civilian population that effectively receive assistance are very low in comparison with the target population.

Although significant progress has been made in reducing violence, we must now ensure unimpeded access for the United Nations and humanitarian assistance to those areas, as well as the freedom of movement to voluntarily enter and leave those territories. This would ensure that the basic principles of international humanitarian law are being upheld. The Security Council must be vigilant when it comes to this humanitarian crisis. Just as in 2014 it adopted resolution 2165 (2014), which has been successively renewed, most recently with resolution 2332 (2016), it must ensure that the most suitable humanitarian

corridors are protected so that supplies reach their intended destinations. Time is running out and winter is coming.

We hope that, at the Astana meeting, as the three guarantors did in a statement last month, emphasis will be placed on the need to make use of the deactivation of violence zones created in May for quick, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as the need for parties to the conflict to develop confidence-building measures, including the release of detainees and people who have been kidnapped, the delivery of the remains of the dead and the identification of disappeared persons, in order to create better conditions for the success of the political process and a lasting ceasefire. We also hope that by 28 November, at the start of the eighth round of intra-Syrian talks in Geneva convened by Special Envoy De Mistura, the humanitarian situation will be showing signs of improvement.

The priorities in Syria are clearly defined. We need a political solution that will end the war and ensure a peaceful political transition, consolidate the local cessation of hostility agreements and ensure humanitarian access to the millions of people who need it in areas that are under siege or hard to reach, regardless of who are conducting the sieges and who are subjected to them.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia is grateful for the briefing provided by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock. We express our support to him in carrying out his mandate.

We deplore the fact that the crisis in Syria has generated so much suffering, destruction and loss of human life. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there have been more than 500,000 deaths since the conflict began and around 7,000 just from January to September this year. It is unacceptable that there are now 13.5 million people who require humanitarian assistance, 6.3 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million people who continue to live in areas that are besieged or difficult to access. Many of them are girls, boys and elderly people.

We believe that humanitarian assistance must arrive in an expedited manner and urge the parties to guarantee and facilitate humanitarian access. In that sense, we reiterate once again our heartfelt thanks for and acknowledgement of the work being undertaken by the staff of the various agencies and humanitarian assistance organizations, and we demand that international humanitarian law be upheld while they carry out their risky work on the ground.

Bolivia wishes to highlight the agreements reached at the latest meeting in Astana, held in September. We believe this process is an effective complement to the Geneva negotiations. Since the beginning, it has allowed thousands of lives to be saved thanks to the effective implementation of the de-escalation zones, which has significantly reduced the escalation and level of violence in Syria. We welcome the establishment of new de-escalation zones in eastern Ghouta, in some areas of the north of Homs, Idlib and the neighbouring provinces of Ladhiqiyah, Hama and Aleppo, as well as in areas in southern Syria.

Nevertheless, we reaffirm that the establishment of de-escalation and security zones should be a temporary measure based on a consensus among the guarantors, and under no circumstances should it undermine the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We also highlight the efforts carried out by Russia, Iran and Turkey, the guarantors of the ceasefire on Syrian territory whose joint work created the four violence de-escalation zones, facilitating the establishment of a joint coordination centre that will make it possible to better manage a violence-reduction process in more de-escalation zones.

We underscore the important work that the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic has been carrying out, both as a guarantor of security in the deployment of humanitarian assistance and in the evacuation of people from the areas in which armed confrontations have taken place.

According to OCHA, September was the deadliest month of the year for civilians subjected to daily attacks in residential areas. These recent events in Syria indicate again the urgent need to both revitalize the political process in Geneva and reinforce the tangible results of Astana, in consultation, of course, with all the parties involved, including the Cairo and Moscow platforms, in order to enable the development of confidence-building measures and thereby improve the political and humanitarian situation.

Finally, we express our solidarity with the work being done in Astana, and we commend the commitment of

the host of the dialogue, the Government of Kazakhstan. We call for compliance with the agreements reached in Astana, as well as with resolution 2336 (2016), so that they may be fully implemented.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.